IPC-Reports
Computer Applic. Registry

8 November 1968

MEMORANDUM FOR: Chief, Information Processing Staff, OPPB

Leo:

Your list of "Data for a Computer Application Registry or Control" should produce reasonably accurate quantitative data once you get agreement on the definition of an application among the furnishers of the input, but when you've got it, what will you have, and how will you use it? You may get some insight into hardware utilization and you may get a reasonably good estimate of manpower utilization but these are bits of information which have utility for the manager of a computer center and you should be able to get them fairly readily in some summary form which would satisfactorily serve your purposes. We know the trend is upward in hardware and manpower, and that we will exceed capacity at some point. The data asked for will make it possible to estimate more accurately when that point will be reached, but not much else. This is an important element of control, but does it really help us get at the root of the problem?

Information processing only makes sense when examined from the users point of view. Our experience has been that users rarely iden- tify a problem incorrectly. Their definition of the problem usually is not complete and their solutions usually are not the best. In fact they almost always attempt to solve the problem in terms of its iden- tification rather than its proper definition. Requirements are stated in terms of their preconceived solutions and these are usually con- sidered by the user to represent problem definition. Much of our pre- sent difficulty exists because the working level customer had a friend who was a computer programmer and together they focussed on discrete problem identities in terms of flap oriented solutions and developed applications accordingly. This chipping approach to problem solving can only lead to a continuing upward spiral in hardware and manpower utilization. In the Support Directorate we are seeking, and I think moving at a reasonable pace, toward the development of a method of pro- viding a Support Management overview which we think is required to place the problems in their appropriate CONTEXT, and assure an objective re- view of alternatives.

We are also looking for some reasonable way to deal with PRIORITIES. As long as management avoids some kind of ranking we will
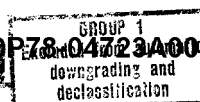
continue to compete among ourselves for resources. We have found no simple way to develop priorities but until we are able to develop office priorities into Directorate priorities, and Directorate priorities are arranged into Agency priorities I don't see how we can expect reasonable adjudications of resource allocations. We made a cut at this in the Agency 5 Year Plan, but it seems to me we should be seeking some way to make the 5 year plan an action document rather than an academic exercise.

It goes without saying that Information Processing systems require good documentation, but we tend to ignore the equally important requirement to DOCUMENT proposals for using the information processing resource in order that intelligent judgments can be made about benefits, utility, payoff. In the Support Directorate we are attempting to provide the following kinds of documentation:

a. A thorough analysis of the system (application?) This analysis is presented in narrative and flow chart form. It identifies what the requirements are and what must be done to satisfy them. We assume the validity of the requirement, usually, until the analysis has been completed, but we do not specify how the requirement will be handled.

b. A "staff study" is prepared stating:

Purpose or objectives
Relationship to on-going projects
Benefits to be derived
Relevant facts (from system analysis)
Discussion of alternatives, including costs,
  equipment, personnel
Recommended alternative
Time frame and target dates

Given these elements of context, priority, and documentation we think we should be able to arrive at informed management decisions at the Directorate level. The important thing is that these decisions are not made by Information Processing managers. They are the responsibility of the line managers, the Deputy Directors, and we should scrupulously avoid the erosion of that responsibility.

We are seeking means of making qualitative judgments which will permit the exercise of management control over the generation and perpetuation of computer applications. If we are able to do that, the quantitative accounting for what we have should follow simply and automatically. I would not expect that you and your staff would or should exercise these controls. You should be interested in their existence and their effectiveness as a means of monitoring information processing activity but the actual management of that activity must be reserved

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to the Deputy Directors. It seems to me that you and your staff should be working with the Information Processing Coordinators toward the development of systems uniform where uniformity has merit, for managing information processing activity qualitatively.
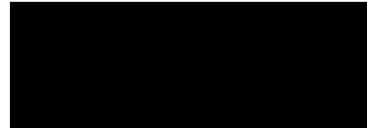
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Chief, Support Services Staff

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